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FORMULA

FOR THE

GOVERNMENT & DISCIPLINE

OF THE

EVANGELIC LUTHERAN

CHURCHES

IN

Maryland and Virginia.

TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE GENERAL SYNOD
IN OCTOBER, 1823.

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FORMULA

For the Government and Discipline, &c.

THE Evangelic Lutheran Church in Maryland and Virginia, having heretofore been governed by laws and principles merely consuetudinary and unwritten, derived from Scripture and the practice of their ancestors; some diversity has gradually and naturally arisen in the practice of different sections of the church. And experience having demonstrated that a discrepance of views and feelings among members of the same Church, on the subject of ecclesiastical Goverment and Discipline, exerts a prejudicial influence; and believing that the adoption of a specific "form" of Government and Discipline would tend to correct the views and harmonize the feelings prevalent on this subject, as well as subserve the real interest of the Redeemer's kingdom: Therefore, the Synod of the Evangelic Lutheran Church in Maryland and Virginia have after mature delibertion digested the following "form" and adopted it for the use of their several Churches.

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY PRINCIPLES.

SECT. I. We believe that from an examination of the works of nature and the course of events, we may derive evidence of the existence of God and the prominent truths of natural religion 1

SECT. II But that the evidence of natural religion is not such as to afford us a satisfactory knowledge of the nature of God and our relation to him; nor its influence sufficient to urge us to duty 2, and that therefore a farther revelation from God is desirable.

SECT. III. We believe that such a revelation God has given, at sundry times and in divers manners unto the fathers and in later days by his *Divine son* Jesus Christ, and his inspired servants, 3, and that this revelation is contained in the books known in the ~~christian world~~, as the Old 4 and New Testament: that every individual is bound to receive this as his infallible rule of faith and practice, and to be governed by it. 5

1. Rom. I, 20. —2. Acts IV, 12. Rom. III, 1, 2.——3. Hebrews I, 1. 2
4. 2 Tim III. 16.——5. John V, 39. Acts XVII, 11. John XIV, 16, 17.

SECT. IV. We hold that liberty of conscience and the free exercise of private judgment in matters of religion, are natural and unalienable rights of men, of which no government, civil or ecclesiastical can deprive us.6

SECT. V. As order is necessary to the prosperity of every associate body, and as Jesus Christ has left no entire, specific form of Government and Discipline for his Church; it is the duty of every individual Church to adopt such regulations as appear to them most consistent with the spirit and precepts of the New Testament, and best calculated to subserve the interests of the Church of Christ.

SECT. VI. And as men exercising the right of private judgment, agree in the opinion, that christianity requires a social connexion among its professors* and as experience proves that men will differ in some of their views of doctrine and discipline; and as two much difference of opinion would be prejudicial to the objects of the association; therefore reason dictates that those of similar views should associate together, that it is their duty to require for admission to church-membership among them, or for induction into the sacred office and for continuance in either, such terms as they deem most accordant with the precepts and spirit of the Bible.

SECT. VII. Upon the broad basis of these principles, was the Evengelic Lutheran Church founded immediately after the Reformation. Adhering to the same principles, the Church in America is governed by *three judicatories:* the *Council* of each individual Church, and the *district Synods* consisting of all the clergy, and an equal number of laymen from a particular district of country, and one GENERAL SYNOD formed by representatives from all the different Synods of the Lutheran Church. The ratio of clerical and lay-representatives is determined in the Constitution of the GENERAL SYNOD; and the *powers* of this body are only those of an *Advisory Council.*

CHAPTER II. OF THE CHURCH.

PART I.

OF THE INVISIBLE CHURCH.

SECT. I. The true or invisible Church of Christ is the collective body of all,7, those of every religious denomination in the world, who are in a state of grace.8

II. The true Church of Christ is a spiritual,9, society, consisting of members whose qualifications,10, are spiritual, and who are associated for spiritual purposes.11

6. Rom. II, 13, 15 and others. Dan. VI, 1, 23. Acts IV, 19.
*Acts II, 44. 7. Eph. IV, 1, 7 8. Math. VII, 21. XII, 50. Acts X, 35 9. John XVIII, 36. 10. 1 John IV, 13.
11. Eph. IV, 12. 1 Thess. V, 11.

III. It is a catholic or universal[12] society; its members not being confined to any particular nation or religious denomination.

PART II.

OF THE EXTERNAL OR VISIBLE CHURCH.

SECT. I. The visible Church is the collective body of those who profess the christian religion; consisting of all those who have been admitted to membership by baptism[13] and have not been deprived of it by ex-communication.

II. Of this society our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is the true and only head;[14] having neither abandoned his church nor appointed any vicar in his stead.

III. As the spirit of christianity leads its possessor to social intercourse[15] with each other; and as such a connexion is essential to the accomplishment of the objects of the christian church; and as such a relation can subsist only among person of contiguous residence; therefore christians living near together have from the time of the apostles[16] formed themselves into societies for the better attainment of the objects of the christian institution. And every society participates in the duties of the whole church.

IV. It is the duty of every such society and of the visible church at large, to have the word and sacraments administered in their purity[17] to give an adequate and just support to the pastor or pastors who minister unto them, to provide for the perpetuation of an able and faithful ministry[18] and to endeavour to propagate the gospel to the ends of the earth[19]

V. It is the duty of the church to watch over the purity and faithfulness of her members.

VI. The jurisdiction of the church is purely spiritual; it ought to have no connexion with the civil government,[21] neither ought its decisions be enforced by the arm of civil power.

VII. The power of the church is purely *declarative*, whether exercised by an individual, church council, or by any other ecclesiastical judicatory, i. e., the *bible* is their juridical code and their decisions are valid only because founded on scripture.

VIII. The visible church is not an association to which we may belong or not at our option; but it is the duty of every one who has an opportunity to be a faithful member of it.[22]

12. 1 Cor. I, 2. John X, 16. Rom. XII, 4. Eph. IV, 4, 6.
13. Matt. XXVIII, 19.
14. Eph. V, 23, 24. I, 22.
15. John XIII, 34, 35. Eph. IV, 5. V, 19.
16. Acts II, 41, 47. 1 Thes. II, 14. Gal. I, 22.
17. 1 Tim. IV, 6. VI, 3, 5. Gal. I, 8, 9.
18. Tit. I, 5. 2 Tim. 2.
19. Matth. XXVIII, 19, 20.
20. 1 Cor. V, 7, 13.
21. John XVIII, 36
22. Matth. XXVIII, 19. XI, 28, 29.

CHAPTER III.

OF THE OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH.

Of Pastors.

SECT. I. Our Lord and Saviour himself instituted the clerical office in the New Testament church and made it of perpetual standing 23 The persons filling this office, are in scripture designated by different names, as bishop, presbyter, or elder, &c 24 indicative of the duties of the office. All these are by divine right of equal rank,25 and their duties are principally these: *to expound the word of God, to conduct the public worship of God,26 to administer the sacrements of the church,41 and to admonish men of their duties;27* as well as by all proper means public and private, to edify the the church of Christ.

II. Those officers who were endowed with miraculous gifts and whose instrumentality Christ used in first forming the church, were extraordinary and of temporary standing.

III Pastors are amenable for their conduct to the Synod to which they belong; and that Synod is the tribunal which has the entire jurisdiction over them: excepting in those cases where a regular appeal is obtained to the general Synod agreeably to, Aat. iii, sect v. 1, 2.

OF ELDERS AND DEACONS.

4.5

IV. The other officers of the Church are Elders and Deacons, who are elected by the members of the Church, as their agents to perform some of the duties originally devolving on themselves. Their principal duties are to aid the pastor or pastors in administering the government and discipline of the church; to endeavour to preserve peace and harmony in the church; to visit the congregational schools and promote the religious education of the children of the church; and to visit the sick and afflicted, and aid in the performance of such other duties as are incumbent on the church council.

The duties of the Deacons office are principally these: to lead an exemplary life as commanded in Scripture(*a*) to minister unto the poor27 and extending to their wants and distributing faithfully amongst them the collections which may be made for their use; to assist the pastor in the administration of the Eucharist; to attend and render all necessary service at stated worship; to see that their minister receives a just and adequate support according to the commands of our Lord; to administer the temporal concerns of the church;

23. Matth. XXVIII, 19, 20 2 Tim. II, 2. Tit. I, 5.
24. 1 Cor. IV, 1. Eph. IV, 11.
25. Luke XXII, 25, 26. Acts XX, 17 compared with 28.
26. Eph. IV, 11, 12. Acts VIII, 28, 31. 1 Peter V, 1, 2.
41 Matth XXVIII, 19. 1 Cor. XI, 23. 1 Cor. IV, 1.
27. Acts VI, 2, 6 (*a*) Vide 1st Tim viii, 13, and others

and to aid in the performance of such other duties as are incumbent on the church council. Both these officers are elected by the people and it is their duty to feel the deepest interest in the advancement of piety among the members of the church and to exert their utmost influence to promote it.

2 V. The elders and deacons are the representatives of the whole church, and each church council shall determine the number of their officers and the term of their duration in office; yet in no case shall they serve less than two years, nor more than eight, unless re-elected

3 VI. When persons have been elected to the office of elder or deacon. they shall be inducted into their office according to the form prescribed by the church (a) Those congregations which have been in the habit of having trustees, may if they deem it expedient still retain them, and continue to them the same privileges heretofore exercised.

CHAPTER IV.

OF THE CHURCH COUNCIL.

4 SECT. I. The church council is the lowest judicatory of the church consisting of the pastor or pastors and all the elders and deacons of a particular church.

5 II. The Pastor, together with half of the other existing members of the council, and in the necessary absense of the Pastor, two thirds of the remaining members of the council, shall constitute a quorum.

6 III. But no business connected with the government or discipline of the church, shall be transacted without the presence of the minister, unless his absence is unavoidable or voluntary, or the church be vacant. And when present, the pastor shall be exofficio chair-man.

7 IV. The church council 28 shall have the superintendance of all the temporal concerns of the church and shall see that they are administered with wisdom, faithfulness and justice. They shall also elect a deputy to represent them at the annual synodical meeting.

8 V. It shall be the duty of the council to admit to membership adults who shall make application and whom on mature examination they shall judge to be possessed of the qualifications hereafter specified 29 They shall be obedient subjects of divine grace, either born of the spirit of God, or seeking a change of heart—that is, they must either be genuine chris-

28 Acts VI, 2 6
29 Mark XVI, 16 John III 5 Acts VIII, 12 XVI, 14 & 15
(a) Vide "Liturgie, &c"—

tians, or satisfy the church council that their intentions are sincere. Also to admit to the communion of the church all those who were admitted to church membership, in their infancy and whom on like examination they shall judge possessed of the above mentioned qualifications. No one shall be considered a fit subject for confirmation who has not previously attended a course of religious lectures, delivered by the pastor on the most important doctrines and principles of religion; unless the pastor should be satisfied that the applicant's attainments are adequate without this attendance. And when adults are admitted to membership, their baptism shall if possible be performed publicly before the church; and when members who were baptised in their infancy are admitted to full communion, they shall in the same public manner *confirm* their baptismal vows according to the form of confirmation customary in the church.(*a*)

VI. It shall be the duty of the council to administer the discipline of the church, on all those whose conduct is inconsistent with their christian profession, or who entertain fundamental errors.30 To this end they shall have power to cite any of their church members to appear before them; and to endeavour to obtain other witnesses when the case may require it. It shall further be the duty of the council when any member offends, first privately to admonish him, or if necessary to call him to an account, & when they shall deem these measures ineffectual, to suspend or excommunicate him, that is to debar him from the privileges peculiar to church membership, according to the precepts of the New Testament laid down in this form. It shall also be their duty to restore 34 those subjects of suspension or ex communication to all the privileges of the church, who shall manifest sincere repentance. Every act of ex-communication or of restoration may be published to the church, if deemed necessary by the majority of the council.

VII. The church council may at any time be convened by the minister; and it shall be his duty to call a meeting, when requested by two members of the council, or when directed by the Synod.

VIII. It shall be the duty of the church council to watch over the religious education of the children of the church and to see that they be occasionally collected, for the purpose of being taught the catechism of the church & instructed in the duties and principles of the christian religion. The council of every church shall have the management of the school house attached to that church, and shall be *ex-officio* trustees of the same. They shall endeavor to obtain pious, well qual-

30 1 Cor V 7, 13 34 2 Cor II, 7 Gal VI, I (*a*) Acts XIX, 6

ified and faithful teachers, and to see that the children of the church, as far as practicable attend this school, and that they be there also taught the catechism of the church, and in general the duties of religion. In all places where there is not yet a school house attached to the church, they shall encourage the people and endeavour to have one erected. And no person shall teach in any of our congregational school houses without the permission of the church council.

IX. The church council shall keep a record of their proceedings, of all the baptisms and marriages, and of persons admitted to sacramental communion; and this record shall be annually sent to the synod for inspection.

X. In all cases of appeal from the decisions of the church council, the council shall take no further measures grounded on their decision until the sentence has been reviewed by the synod. But if the decision appealed from be a sentence of suspension or excommunication, it shall immediately take effect and continue in force until reversed by the synod. And in every case of appeal, the church council shall send a detailed and correct account of their preceeding in the case of the charges and evidence on both sides.

CHAPTER V.

Of Church Members.

I. The members of any particular church are all those members of the *visible* (see chap. 2, part 2, sect. 1,) church, who are associated together under some form of christian government and discipline, for divine worship and the better attainment of the objects of the christian institution.

II. Every church member is amenable to the council, and must appear before them when cited and submit to the discipline of the church regularly administered. 35

III. It is the duty of every church member to lead a christian life; that is, to perform all the duties required of him or her in scripture. Thus it is the duty of adults to perform all the christian duties, not to neglect the public worship of God; 36, nor the participation of the Lord's Supper 37 whenever an opportunity is afforded. It is the duty of parents to educate their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, 38, to teach them the doctrines of the church, and to subject them to the ordinances of the same. 39 And when young members reach the years of maturity and have attained the natural ability to partake of the Lord's Supper in the manner commanded, it is their duty to be worthy communicants at the Lord's table.

35 Tit iii, 10 Math xviii, 17, 18
36 Heb x, 25
37 1st Cor xi, 24, 25
38 Eph vi, 4
39 Eph vi, 4 2d Tim iii, 14, 15

IV. Any member being dissatisfied with the decision of the church council relative to himself, may appeal to the synod. But in every such case, the applicant shall give notice to the church council of his intention, either immediately or within two weeks of the time when the sentence was made known to him; and shall specify to them the reasons of his dissatisfaction and the ground of his appeal.

CHAPTER VI.

Of Elections.

I. All congregational elections must be published by the church council to the congregation at least two weeks before the election.

II. The council may publish a congregational meeting for any lawful purpose when they shall deem it necessary, and they shall be compelled so to do when required by one third of the lawful electors of the church.

III. The electors of any particular church in our connexion, are all those who are in full communion with the same, who submit to its government and discipline regularly administered, and who contribute according to their ability and engagements to all its necessary expenditures.

IV. At all elections for *Elders* or *Deacons*, no person may be elected to either of said offices who is not a member in full communion with said church.

V. When an election is held in a vacant congregation for a pastor, two thirds of all the electors shall be necessary to an election, and if the votes were not unanimous, it is recommended that the presiding officer shall invite the minority to concur in the decision. He shall give them a certificate, signed by himself, of the election. This certificate, with a statement of the support which they promise him, shall be a legal call to the pastor therein specified.

VI At elections for members of the church council, the existing council shall nominate twice as many persons as are to be elected, from whom the officers, [illegible] be chosen.

VII. If from any cause a vacancy occurs in the council in the interval between the stated elections, it shall be filled without delay by a special election, and the person thus elected shall serve until the regular expiration of the time of the member in whose place he was elected.

* If each elector may nominate one [illegible]

1 Erskine's Evidence.
1 Do. on Faith.
2 Dr. Lochman's History, Doctrine and Discipline of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. And others.

The Rev. Mr. Medtart was appointed as missionary for three months, to labour in such destitute sections of our country, as the President may direct.

The Rev. Mr. Medtart having generously declined receiving any money from the Treasury of the Synod to defray his expenses, and the Synod being thus enabled to send another missionary; the Rev. Mr. Little was accordingly appointed for the same term, and under the same direction.

The brethren then united with our worthy President, and, on bended knees, addressed the mercy-seat of Christ; offering their gratitude for that measure of his gracious influence which was experienced during the meeting, commending the church and her interests to the protection and guidance of his gracious Spirit, and dedicating themselves anew to his service forever.

WEDNESDAY EVENING.

Ordination and *Licensure.*

The Rev. Mr. Sackman preached on Acts xiv. 22. "*Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*"

The Rev. Mr. Schnee was then solemnly ordained as Pastor.

The duties and privileges of Licentiates were read to Messrs. Medtart and Little, and, after imposing on them the customary obligations, they were licensed as Candidates for one year.

The Pastor loci now addressed the audience in an interesting and impressive exhortation, presented to the citizens of the town the grateful acknowledgements of the brethren, for the distinguished hospitality with which they had been entertained during their sojourning amongst them; after which the benediction was pronounced and the audience dismissed.

Attest, SAM. S. SCHMUCKER,
Secretary.